

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-31

NEW YORK TIMES  
19 MARCH 1982

WASHINGTON, March 18 — For a week before the tragic death of a Dutch television team in El Salvador, State Department cable traffic between The Hague in the Netherlands and The Haig in Foggy Bottom was sizzling about "the interview that never was" in an Argentine newspaper. The episode illustrates how misinformation is being used to generate fear about the United States.

"Operation Safe Pass," a 10-day NATO maritime exercise that ended this week, was designed to give seamen of the NATO countries practice in working together to protect trans-Atlantic sea lanes. The exercise was originally planned to be held off the coast of Canada, but because the weather threatened to make everybody seasick, it was switched to the Caribbean.

That afforded leftist propagandists in Europe an extraordinary opportunity to exploit isolationist sentiment in the Netherlands. (Europeans have labeled the most extreme form of détente "Hollanditis.")

"The Dutch Ministry of Defense has requested urgent clarification," cabled our Ambassador there, "of alleged remarks by Ambassador Kirkpatrick that NATO exercise Safe Pass is directly related to concerns about El Salvador." The Defense Minister had "already received a number of parliamentary inquiries about the Ambassador's purported statements," and "the controversy could make it politically difficult" for the Dutch to participate in subsequent Caribbean exercises, including Ocean Venture 82.

The storm in the Netherlands was stirred by the publication in a left-wing newspaper there of remarks supposedly made by the U.S. delegate to the U.N., Jeane Kirkpatrick, to an Argentine weekly. She was quoted directly as saying "Various ships which operate in Europe will be transferred to the Caribbean because of the excellent training of their crews in information and communication tasks."

That quotation, translated from Spanish into Dutch and sent to the

## ESSAY Misinformation, Please

By William Safire

country with seven vessels in the maneuvers, signaled "spy ships" to the neutralist Dutch, who are more concerned with the freedom of terrorists in El Salvador than workers in Eastern Europe. America's U.N. representative was then quoted as saying ominously: "The presence of NATO ships and aircraft have more than a symbolic meaning."

Here was the United States' U.N. representative seeming to involve Dutch ships in our war against agrarian reformers in El Salvador; no wonder the Dutch Defense Minister was tearing his hair. Secretary Haig queried our U.N. mission in New York, and received this reply: "Alleged remarks by Ambassador Kirkpatrick are completely untrue. . . . Allegations are preposterous, totally unfounded science fiction."

Incensed at this use of her name in a phony story, Mrs. Kirkpatrick demanded and received an apology from the reporter, Florencia Braguinsky, who had signed the story in the Argentine weekly: "You never made any comments to me or to 'Somos' magazine on the subject of NATO maneuvers in the Caribbean."

Her boss, Alberto Oliva, added: "We never interviewed you on this matter. . . . it was just an elaboration either of the anchorman or a political commentator while the TV image showed you entering the Senate."

Thus, the purported quotation was from a disembodied "voiceover," a film clip of Mrs. Kirkpatrick. But then a Dutch reporter in Mexico took that false quotation and was able to raise grave questions in his country's Parliament.

Has the press in the Netherlands exposed "the interview that never was," and otherwise made good on the blackening of the U.S. role in NATO? That has not happened, and now that the atmosphere has been further poisoned by suspicions that the Dutch newsmen might have been murdered, it is not likely to happen.

Meanwhile next month's maneuver called "Ocean Venture 82" — planned as amphibious assault training — was changed when Venezuela objected to the sight of any troops hitting its beaches at a time when Nicaragua is bracing itself for just such an eventuality. The Dutch are supposed to have a frigate in our training exercise; we'll see if they find some excuse to sail quietly away.

This brouhaha over an escalated misquotation is another example of a willingness to accept the worst about the U.S. In an unclassified report titled "Forgeries of U.S. Documents," prepared by the European Branch of U.S.I.A., chapter and verse is given on specific cases of forgeries of Army manuals and phony texts of interviews with U.S. officials.

The forgery report has been distributed only to our embassies, with instructions on how to recognize counterfeit documents; it should be required reading at editorial desks and journalism schools as well. (It lacks only the phony paragraphs our C.I.A. in the 50's inserted in its distribution of Khrushchev's "secret speech.")

The desire of some European leftists to equate El Salvador with Poland and Afghanistan is fierce. But when a story is shown to be an outright fabrication, is a retraction too much to ask for?